



THE LOTUS BUD

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Dear Sangha,

Thay advises us to practice stopping, calming and looking deeply. We stop and calm ourselves so that we can look deeply and become wiser. Wisdom or insight here really means ways of thinking and looking at the world which lead to actions that reduce suffering. In other words, insight is thought and action which leads to the reduction of suffering.

In this edition of *The Lotus Bud* we begin with one definition of wisdom in Buddhism and follow this with part of a talk given by Thay on the theme of insight. In the extract in this issue we concentrate on the understanding and practice of impermanence as a form of wisdom and we offer you an activity that may help deepen your wisdom practice. 

What is wisdom?

The highest wisdom is seeing that in reality all phenomena are incomplete, impermanent, and not self. This understanding is totally freeing and leads to the great security and happiness which is called Nirvana. However, the Buddha doesn't speak too much about this level of wisdom. It is not wisdom if we simply believe what we are told. True wisdom is to directly see and understand for ourselves.

At this level then, wisdom is to keep an open mind rather than being closed-minded, listening to other points of view rather than being bigoted; to carefully examine facts that contradict our beliefs, rather than burying our heads in the sand; to be objective rather than prejudiced and partisan; to take time about forming our opinions and beliefs rather than

just accepting the first or most emotional thing that is offered to us; and to always be ready to change our beliefs when facts that contradict them are presented to us.

A person who does this is certainly wise and is certain to eventually arrive at true understanding. The path of just believing what you are told is easy. The Buddhist path requires courage, patience, flexibility and intelligence. 

<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/qanda07.htm>

Impermanence

Impermanence means that everything changes and nothing remains the same in any consecutive moment.

The practice and understanding of impermanence is not just another description of reality. It is a tool that helps us in our transformation, healing and emancipation.

Practicing impermanence

All of us can understand impermanence with our intellect, but this is not yet true understanding. Our intellect alone will not lead us to freedom. It will not lead us to enlightenment. When we are solid and we concentrate, we can practice looking deeply. And when we look deeply and see the nature of impermanence, we can then be concentrated on this deep insight. This is how the insight of impermanence becomes part of our being. It becomes our daily experience.

We have to maintain the insight of impermanence in order to be able to see and live impermanence all the time. If we can use impermanence as an object of our meditation, we will nourish the understanding of impermanence in such a way that it will live in us every day. 

With this practice impermanence becomes a key that opens the door of reality. We also cannot uncover the insight into impermanence for only a moment and then cover it up and see

everything as permanent again.

Most of the time we behave with our children as though they will always be at home with us. We never think that in three or four years they will leave us to marry and have their own family. Therefore we do not value the moments our child is with us. I know many parents whose children, when they are eighteen or nineteen years old, leave home and live on their own. The parents lose their children and feel very sorry for themselves. Yet the parents did not value the moments they had with their children.

The same is true of husbands and wives. You think that your spouse will be there for the whole of your life but how can you be so sure? We really have no idea where our partner will be in twenty or thirty years, or even tomorrow. It is very important to remember every day the practice of impermanence. 

Seeing emotions through the eyes of impermanence

When somebody says something that makes you angry and you wish they would go away, please look deeply with the eyes of impermanence. If he or she were gone, what would you really feel? Would you be happy or would you weep?

Practicing this insight can be very helpful. There is a *gatha*, or poem, we can use to help us:

*Angry in the ultimate dimension
I close my eyes and look deeply.
Three hundred years from now
Where will you be and where shall I be?*

When we are angry, what do we usually do? We shout, scream, and try to blame someone else for our problems. But looking at anger with the eyes of impermanence, we can stop and breathe. Angry at each other in the ultimate dimension, we close our eyes and look deeply.

We try to see three hundred years into the future. What will you be like? What will I be like? Where will you be? Where will I be? We need only to breathe in and out, look at our future and at the other person's future. We do not need to look as far as three hundred years. It could be fifty or sixty years from now when we have both passed away. Looking at the future, we see that the other person is very precious to us. When we know we can lose them at any moment, we are no longer angry. We want to embrace her or him and say, "How wonderful, you are still alive. I am so happy. How could I be angry with you? Both of us have to die someday and while we are still alive and together it is foolish to be angry at each other." 

The reason we are foolish enough to make ourselves suffer and make the other person suffer is we forget that we and the other person are impermanent. Someday when we die we will lose all our possessions, our power, our family, everything.

Our freedom, peace and joy in the present moment is the most important thing we have. But without an awakened understanding of impermanence it is not possible to be happy. If we really understood and remembered that life was impermanent, we would do everything we

could to make the other person happy right here and right now. If we spend twenty-four hours being angry at our beloved, it is because we are ignorant of impermanence. "Angry in the ultimate dimension/I close my eyes." I close my eyes in order to practice visualization of my beloved one hundred or three hundred years from now.

When you visualize yourself and your beloved in three hundred years' time, you just feel so happy that you are alive today and that your dearest is alive today. You open your eyes and all your anger has gone. You open your arms to embrace the other person and you practice: "Breathing in you are alive, breathing out I am so happy." When you close your eyes to visualize yourself and the other person in three hundred years' time, you are practicing the meditation on impermanence. In the ultimate dimension, anger does not exist. Hatred is also impermanent. Although we may be consumed with hatred at this moment, if we know that hatred is impermanent we can do something to change it. 🙏

A practitioner can take resentment and hatred and help it to disappear. Just like with anger, we close our eyes and think: where will we be in three hundred years? With the understanding of hatred in the ultimate dimension, it can evaporate in an instant.

Let impermanence nurture love

Because we are ignorant and forget about impermanence, we don't nurture our love properly. When we first married our love was great. We thought that if we did not have each other we would not be able to live one more day.

Because we did not know how to practice impermanence, after one or two years our love changed to frustration and anger. Now we wonder how we can survive one more day if we have to remain with the person we once loved so much. We decide there is no alternative: we want a divorce.

If we live with the understanding of impermanence we will cultivate and nurture our love. Only then will it last. You have to nourish and look after your love for it to grow. 🙏

From *No Fear, No Death: Comforting Wisdom for Life*, by Thich Nhat Hanh (2002)

As his death approached, the Buddha said:

***Be a light unto yourself;
Seek no external refuge. Hold fast to the Truth. Look not for refuge to anyone besides yourselves.***

As an exercise try writing down actions you can do to nourish and grow your love.

Don't be too ambitious, just write down one or two things to start with that you then commit to enacting. Like: "I will call my mother/father/sister/ or brother just to ask how they are and only to listen to what they have to say without judging or reacting to what I hear" Then carry out what you have written down within the week.

As you practice like this your confidence and faith in your ability to grow your love will become stronger.

By doing something like this you transform the idea of impermanence into the practice of impermanence and your wisdom of love will shine out in all directions. 🙏

WHO WE ARE

The Communities of Mindful Living are inspired by the Buddhist teachings of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (pictured).



We aspire to live fully in each moment for the peace and happiness of ourselves and all beings. We meet regularly to observe the art of mindful living and to foster a supportive community of practitioners. 

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Notices...

Wednesday night Lotus Bud Sangha at the Buddhist library in Camperdown.

All welcome.

Autumn Retreat this year will be held during the Easter long weekend, from Friday to Sunday: 29 - 31 March, at St Joseph Conference Center in Bringelly, which is about 22km from Liverpool.

How to contribute

Email to: cbarker@uow.edu.au

Post to: Chris Barker, Faculty of Arts, Uni of Wollongong, 2500

Reading bell

As you read this magazine you have an opportunity to go back to the present moment.

You will notice a bell:  throughout the magazine.

When you come to each bell, you may like to stop reading, clear your mind and return to your breath before continuing.

Our main activities

Wednesday Mindfulness Meditation at Camperdown

We welcome all to come join us for meditation practice - We meet at 7:30 pm each Wednesday at the Buddhist Library, Church St, Camperdown, Sydney.

Mindfulness Days - monthly

Once a month we offer a day of mindful practice and contemplation. The day normally consists of chanting sitting meditation, outdoor walking meditation (if weather permits), a dharma talk and lunch.

Mindfulness Days at Nhap Luu (Entering the Stream) Meditation Centre
221 Maria's Lane
Beaufort VIC 3733
streammpc@gmail.com www.plumvillageasia.org